

## THE ANGLO-CATHOLIC PROBLEM

IT is always difficult to see a situation from a point of view which has never been ours, and it is sometimes more difficult to recapture, in imagination and sympathy, a point of view which is ours no longer. The more ardent our conviction the more difficult is the task of approaching a situation with the eyes and hearts of those who differ from us. Yet normally the accomplishment of this task is a necessary preliminary to all fruitful controversy. If you attack a man's strong convictions and, in attacking them, betray your blindness to their influence over his heart and mind, or to the real truth implicit in them, you will produce nothing but irritation and a stronger loyalty to the error you are trying to dislodge. To be able to understand and to show that you understand what his convictions mean to him; to be able to separate in your own mind the true from the false in the things that claim his allegiance, is the only sure way of securing from him a fair hearing for the truth which he lacks and you possess.

In our relations with Anglo-Catholics we are generally conspicuously remiss in acting upon these first principles of fruitful controversy, and our failure arises in part from a quite natural inability to understand a point of view very different from our own. The result is an inevitable feeling, generally inarticulate, that an Anglo-Catholic must be either a knave or a fool. Even when unconsciously present in the mind this presupposition does not make for success in controversy, when we are faced by opponents whose learning and honesty are probably not less than our own. The following pages are an attempt to set down some considerations, often overlooked, which, if fully realised, would, perhaps, eliminate a false presupposition and make easier the understanding of

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a complex problem; a problem, moreover, which is in grave need of solution.

Anglo-Catholicism is not a negligible quantity in contemporary religious life; numerically small, intellectually and spiritually it is vigorous and, what is more important, it is still a stronghold of intelligent belief in supernatural religion. Hitherto it has offered a stout resistance, in the main, to the inroads of naturalistic modernism, by which the religious world surrounding it is being fast disintegrated and reduced to a state of sentimental agnosticism. But signs are not wanting that its resistance is beginning to give way very much more seriously than it has done in the past, and that unless this mass of inchoate Catholicism can find safe anchorage in the authority of the Catholic Church it will soon be absorbed and dissipated in the religious chaos which surrounds it.

This view of the importance of Anglo-Catholicism presupposes that the movement is a slow gravitation towards the Church, unconscious of its ultimate destination, but alive and full of a vitality which is capable, in the future, of absorbing the full truth, as it has, in the past, a part of it. If this view is the true one Catholics should exert every possible effort to guide the development of Anglo-Catholicism and to ensure that nothing they do will hinder it or divert it from its true course. This does not involve any minimising of the duty of individual submission to the Church in the case of those who are clearly ready for it; but it does involve a reversal of the present attitude of much of our controversy, which embitters rather than persuades, because it is blind to the real tendency of Anglo-Catholicism. Such a reversal might do much, in view of the distracted state of the Church of England, towards bringing about the ultimate submission of a considerable section of it. It

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is much to be hoped that those who adopt an attitude which is patronising and often contemptuous may be induced, by a better understanding of the situation they are dealing with, to alter the tone and emphasis of their controversial writings, which are only likely to harden the opposition of Anglo-Catholics at a time when other circumstances are making them specially amenable to the truth.

In order to see Anglo-Catholicism in its true proportions we must bear in mind the circumstances of its origin. In the first decades of the last century the life of the Church of England was at a very low ebb; never in its whole history had it been more dryly Protestant. The high sacramental doctrine which had been taught and practised by the Caroline divines survived only in remnants, hidden away in obscure country parsonages. From this unpromising soil sprang the Oxford Movement with its strong insistence on Historic Christianity and, in particular, on the sacramental system. The result was a revival of the use of the sacraments which went far beyond anything that the Church of England had yet produced. The movement spread rapidly, and the revival of sacramental usage brought in its train a revival of ceremonial, the natural accompaniment of strong belief in the necessity and efficacy of sacraments. From this early movement has grown up the Anglo-Catholic system of life and worship, similar in almost every respect to that which has always been the possession of the Catholic Church. This system has been built, in spite of strong opposition, into the structure of the Church of England, the formularies of which contained enough survivals of ancient Catholicity to enable the movement first, to withstand inevitable persecution; and finally, to gain a recognised place among the parties of which the Church of England is composed.

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In recalling these well-known facts two points need emphasis. The first is that the movement, in origin and subsequent history, is a spontaneous outburst of belief in sacramental doctrine. From the first its adherents recognised the truth that the Christian life, as given to the world by Our Lord, is a life surrounded by sacraments, supported and nourished by sacramental grace, with the Eucharistic Sacrifice as its centre. This idea is the mainspring of the movement and the source of its inspiration. Ardent devotion to what he believes to be the Mass and the sacraments is a characteristic mark of the Anglo-Catholic. It is difficult to explain these facts unless it be granted that the movement, in so far as it is an approximation to Catholic truth, is due to a special working of God's grace by which, in His own good time, He intends to bring back our countrymen in greater numbers than hitherto to the unity of the Faith. The second point to be emphasised is this; the movement began and has continued as a spontaneous outburst of belief in a new way of life, and in consequence it has never laid stress on a logical theory of the constitution, unity, and authority of the Church. It has been a life to be lived first, and then justified how it may. Its adherents have embraced it with enthusiastic self-sacrifice, they have appealed for its support to the traditions of Historic Christendom in every age, they have borrowed their doctrinal formulas and devotional models from the same source, and so absorbed have they been in constructing and fighting for this way of life that they have never concerned themselves deeply with the question of how their life so lived, within the accommodating borders of the Church of England, can be made to fit into any consistent theory of the Church, One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic, giving its sanction, here and now, to the teaching and ordinances that they prize.

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It is this that makes the understanding of Anglo-Catholicism so difficult for Catholics. In spite of its close approximation to Catholic life and practice, there is a wide difference between the Catholic and the Anglo-Catholic mind. No one realises this so clearly as a Catholic who has been an Anglo-Catholic and has had to assimilate by degrees the Catholic point of view. A Catholic is in close touch with a living, concrete, visible institution which surrounds him and touches his life at every point. It directs and guards him with a living voice and a visible hand. He accepts his faith and conduct from this ever-present, living reality, which guarantees for him the validity of his spiritual experience. The sacraments he receives, the Mass he offers, and the priesthood which offers it are given to him by the divine authority of this visible society with which he is in immediate contact. It is otherwise with the Anglo-Catholic. The only living, visible society with which he is in contact is the Church of England, and the Church of England does not really give him the faith or practice by which he lives. That faith and practice can be made compatible (at least in his own eyes) with the formularies of the Church of England; it is recognised within certain limits and tolerated within wider limits by the authorities of the Church of England, but it is not proposed to him in clear and unqualified terms by the living voice of the Church of England, and the Anglo-Catholic has constantly to appeal for the sanctions of his faith and practice, behind the institution with which he is in immediate contact to an abstract conception, which has no existence as a visible organic unity. This abstract conception is the common witness in every age to doctrine and practice of Historic, as opposed to Protestant, Christianity; it has as an organised unity no corporate existence, no living voice, no power to develop or define. But for the

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Anglo-Catholic it is the Catholic Church, the Body of Christ, the custodian of God's revelation to men.

This conception colours the whole Anglo-Catholic attitude to religion and sharply differentiates it from our own. At the same time it is not true that the Anglo-Catholic is merely a Protestant sailing under false colours. In practice his outlook and point of view are Catholic in that he looks to external authority, divinely appointed, as his guide in faith and life. He believes the creeds, keeps the commandments, hears Mass, goes to confession, and fasts in a spirit of true obedience to what he believes to be Christ's Holy Catholic Church; but the abstraction to which he appeals under this name can give no answer to the crucial question of its own nature and authority. On that subject Historic Christianity does not speak with unanimity; it fails to claim for itself the authority that he would attribute to it. He is compelled, therefore, on certain points where his ultimate sanction fails him, to fall back on experience—a misleading guide in a region where authority should be supreme. In other words he is unconsciously emptying the idea of authority of its meaning by basing it on personal experience instead of putting the validity of experience to the final test of an already known and recognised authority.

This attitude of mind is characteristic of Anglo-Catholicism, and it explains the tenacious belief of the movement that the Church of England, in spite of all its anomalies, is a genuine part of the Catholic Church. It is notably apparent in the persistent faith of Anglo-Catholics in the validity of Anglican Orders, a faith which often survives long after they have lost their confidence in the Catholic vocation of the Church of England. Apart from the condemnation by Leo XIII (generally attributed to motives of expediency) they ought, on theological principles which

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they themselves accept, to be at least doubtful as to the security of their position. They accept the theology of matter and form and the consequent dictum that form determines the manifestation of intention. Change of form is, therefore, *prima facie* evidence of changed intention. There must, then, be grave uncertainty as to right intention in the use of a new and untraditional form of ordination and consecration, which had its origin in heretical surroundings and was compiled in order to embody changes in traditional doctrine. Yet Anglo-Catholics are troubled comparatively seldom on this score, and their confidence springs not from any warrant of authority or strength of internal evidence, but from an intense belief in the sacramental system and a conviction that the sacraments they have always used do bring them the graces they experience.

In attempting to understand this attitude we must remember that movements which begin in an intense outburst of new life are often slow in the formation of a reasoned basis upon which they must rest, if they are to have real permanence. The intellectual work of the Anglo-Catholic movement has been directed chiefly towards consolidating its right to teach Catholic doctrine within the Church of England. When the question of the nature and authority of the Church has been approached it has generally been in controversy and the method pursued has been that of combating the positions of others rather than of formulating one of its own. But the movement is intellectually vigorous, and in recent years it has become increasingly alive to the necessity of a more constructive apologetic. In one direction this apologetic has taken the form of a re-examination of the evidence for the doctrine of the Papacy, and has resulted in considerable approaches to Catholic teaching, as the Malines Report showed. It is to be hoped that in the future,

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discussion between ourselves and Anglo-Catholics will leave, as far as possible, all side issues, and will concentrate more and more on the examination, both theological and historical, of the Catholic conception of the nature and unity of the Church. This conception once grasped, the doctrine of the Papacy would fall into its rightful place, and the search for truth would end for Anglo-Catholicism as a whole, as it has ended for so many individuals in willing submission to the authority and jurisdiction of the Holy See.

The whole position may be summarised shortly : Anglo-Catholics have grasped and, having grasped, believe intensely a portion of Catholic truth—the sacramental principle. This truth they have learned to live and love within the Church of England; they believe that they possess its reality, and their faith in the Church of England depends upon this belief. It has thus come about that their devotion to one portion of Catholic Truth has blinded them to the necessity of another; that the only guarantee of the true possession of valid sacramental life is the living voice of a visible organic society claiming on its own divinely commissioned authority to give and to have always given that guarantee.

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